



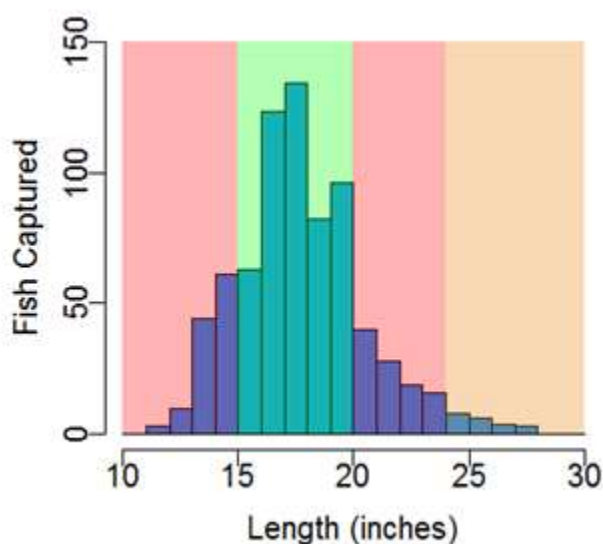
Spring Fisheries Survey Summary Lac Courte Oreilles, Sawyer County, 2016

The Hayward DNR Fisheries Management Team conducted a fyke netting survey on Lac Courte Oreilles from March 28-April 18, 2016 to assess the adult walleye, northern pike, muskellunge, and black crappie populations in the lake. Varying numbers of nets were set overnight for a total of 11 nights which resulted in 121 total net-nights of effort. Quality, preferred, and memorable sizes referenced in this summary are based on standard proportions of world record lengths developed for each species by the American Fisheries Society.

Walleye (Adult)



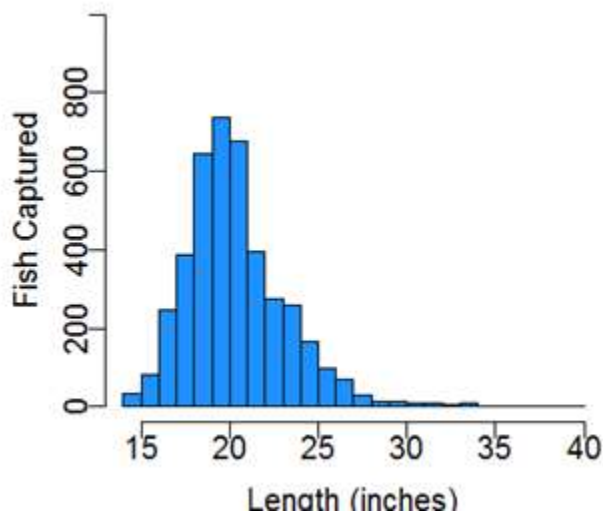
Captured 6 per net-night ≥ 10 inches	
Quality Size $\geq 15"$	84%
Preferred Size $\geq 20"$	17%



Northern Pike



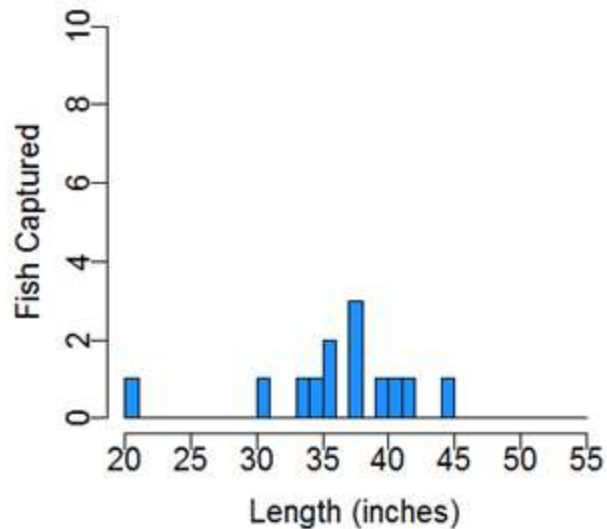
Captured 34 per net-night ≥ 14 inches	
Quality Size $\geq 21"$	33%
Preferred Size $\geq 28"$	1%



Muskellunge



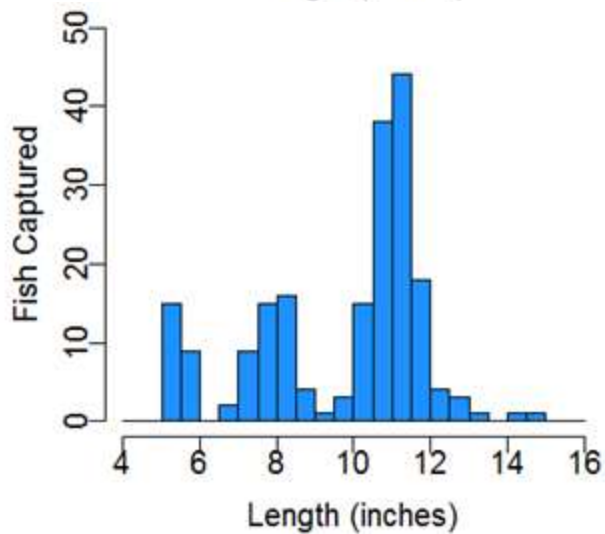
Captured 0.1 per net-night ≥ 20 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 30 "	92%
Memorable Size ≥ 42 "	8%



Black Crappie



Captured 1.6 per net-night ≥ 5 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 8 "	75%
Preferred Size ≥ 10 "	63%



Summary of Results

Lac Courte Oreilles (LCO) is a 5,139 acre drainage lake in western Sawyer County with a maximum depth of 90 feet. Lac Courte Oreilles is a unique fishery resource, the second largest lake in Sawyer County, and one of the largest natural lakes in Wisconsin. The exceptionally clear water makes for a beautiful fishing experience. The lake has always supported an excellent fishery for a variety of species.

Walleye and northern pike were the primary focus of this survey, but information on muskellunge and black crappie is also presented. An electrofishing survey for bass and other panfish was not completed in 2016, but information from other recent electrofishing surveys on LCO is available through the WDNR website.

Walleye in Lac Courte Oreilles have continued to show an adequate amount of natural reproduction to support a fishable population. Our survey showed a well-balanced population with about 67% of fish in the harvest slot (15-20", shown in green above), and 17% of fish larger than 20 inches as well. Continuation of natural reproduction will be the key to sustaining a strong walleye fishery in this lake.

Northern pike are not considered to be native to LCO, but began appearing in the system in the 1950's. Since that time their abundance has continued to grow and they are now very common throughout the lake, particularly in some of the shallow weedy bays (Musky Bay, Stukey Bay,

Little Lac Courte Oreilles). The overall catch rate of 35 per net night reported here is very high, and is largely driven by the high catch rates in Musky Bay shortly after ice out. While pike are abundant, the population may not satisfy many anglers. Size is very poor, with 2/3 of all adult northern pike being less than 21 inches and only 1% being greater than 28 inches. This population likely needs to be thinned to promote better pike growth, but that task is substantial. Anglers have shown a reluctance to harvest small pike, but they are encouraged to do so as it may help restore some balance to the fishery.

Muskellunge were rare in our survey, resulting in a capture rate of only 0.1 muskellunge per net night of effort. The muskellunge population in LCO faces a variety of challenges that include extremely low natural reproduction, competition with other species (northern pike), low stocking success, and adult mortality. It appears that this historic population is a fraction of what it once was. But despite low numbers of muskellunge in this and other recent surveys, the size potential for muskellunge in this lake remains excellent and was not well represented by our limited catch in the fyke netting portion of this survey. We encountered a 49" muskellunge during a recent shocking survey, and several fish in the mid-50's were netted in a previous year. Restoration of muskellunge in LCO should be a top priority.

Black crappie in LCO have low recruitment (likely a result of having many predators in the lake), which keeps density at a low level and helps them attain good size. While there are not overwhelming numbers of crappie in LCO, they are mostly of a size that would be appealing to anglers.



The Hayward Fish Team (Scott Braden – left, Russ Warwick and Max Wolter –right) displaying some small pike, a size that is very common in LCO. Photo by Marcus McGuire.

Report by Max Wolter – Fisheries Biologist, Sawyer County

Survey conducted by Max Wolter, Russ Warwick (Fisheries Technician), Scott Braden (Fisheries Technician), Gene Hatzenbeler (Fisheries Biologist), and Matt Kufahl (Creel Clerk)
Special thanks to volunteers Gary Pulford, Jordan Gensmer, Todd Williamson, Marcus McGuire, and Rachel Radcliff

Reviewed and Approved by Scott Toshner – Acting Supervisor

